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Goat Song, Colossus, Marble Boy

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Three Poems

IDRIS ANDERSON

Goat Song

The bleating goat stood on the rusted frame
of the iron bed under an olive tree,
a rusted chain around his neck, around
the tree and the legs of the bed, so tangled
he could barely turn his head. But he did and looked
at us, at the bus from which we looked.

I was thinking of the world's ancient places,
what remains, how it happens: his head down,
browsing all morning, occasional click of hoof,
shiver of hide flicking fly—motion like a planet
beginning to wobble in orbit, entropy
inevitable, residual effects of such a motion.
One crooked leg unsteady on the edge of the frame,
three stiff feet trembling on rusted springs.

It could just have happened. Not neglect,
I didn't think so—in the shade of the olive
a tub full of water and a chain so long
the goat had dragged a wide dirt circle clean.
At least there was shade and no heavy breathing
through his mouth, his tongue not hanging out.
A gray mud-matted beard dripped from his chin.
At least, I thought, he's alive.

Our bus rolled by the goat and the bed and the tree
and we didn't stop. We were on our way

to Ox-Belly Bay—sand all around in a circle of blue,
 silver around lapis. We walked around and swam across.
 A small bay with a narrow gap between tall cliffs.
 Currents swirled around big rocks—turbulent
 waters Odysseus might have sailed through.
 He found a cunning way to pleasure and moved on.

That hero. But the goat. How he got up there
 I'll never know. A good long chain.
 Cheap labor for cleaning the olive grove.
 The unusual complication of the bed frame.
 A quaint picture of authentic Greek pastoral life,
 the tangled raw difficulty of it.

As I walked easy in the cool bay water
 and swam across and back again—I'm not a strong
 swimmer, I think too much—the odd glimpse,
 such scruff, what you'd never photograph—
 I couldn't get my mind off the goat. The dumb goat.
 I wanted to make a meaning for the goat:
Suffering is wisdom. Or wisdom is suffering.
 Someone else's meaning. No god or grandeur here.
 Just a goat. A dumb suffering goat.

That morning we'd explored a hilltop temple—
 or what was left of it: blocks randomly strewn,
 fluted drums, lintels, a massive architrave.
 We'd read the elegant big geometry of stones
 and traced the mallet's stroke.
 On the altar stone, evidence of ancient fire.
 In excavations of a pit nearby,
 fragments of black bone.

I hadn't yet seen the goat on the bed frame.
 I hadn't yet eaten goat.

Lunch in a taverna in a poor village.
 Chatter of Greek. Chairs scraped the stone floor.
 Across the dirt street a fresh goat hung
 in the shop door. The head and feet still on,

skinned to pink-gray bloodless meat,
 fine lines of young muscle, the ribs
 splayed out to show he'd been gutted clean.
 "Trag" on a bloody tag in Greek, wired
 to the lowest foot, so many drachmas per kilo.

The trag we got was good, fat and seasoned
 with garlic, mint, and something hot
 that wasn't pepper, and just the right
 coarse sea-salt to complement the fat.
 I was sweating quietly in my seat on the bus,
 good meat of goat digesting in my stomach
 when I saw the goat. He was bleating,
 but not yet desperately, at the bus.

Trag-oidia. A goat song.
 The clean-swept arc of an orchestral floor.
 This place of suffering and song.

Nothing I knew could help me with what I saw.